

Air Force Modernization

A large, faint, light gray graphic of the Air Force pentagon logo is centered behind the title text.

by Mr Clai Ellett

FY1999 budget priorities are enduring and unchanged; people first, readiness, and modernization. Each of these areas is closely linked to the others and must be kept in balance. As the Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) concluded, we have chosen a balance between the present and the future, recognizing that our interests and responsibilities do not permit us to choose between the two. This approach retains sufficient force structure to sustain American global leadership and meet the full range of today's requirements. At the same time, it invests in the future force with a focused modernization plan...that introduces new systems and technologies at the right place. The QDR further states that, The result will be a force capable of carrying out today's missions with acceptable strategic risk, while allowing us to stabilize our investment program in order to achieve the future joint force capabilities described in Joint Vision 2010.

Modernization funding, for both the Air Force and the Department of Defense (DoD) as a whole, has been in a steady decline since the mid-1980s. The procurement budget reached its peak in 1985 when it made up 44% of all Air Force funding. Last year procurement funding comprised only 20% of Air Force total funding, representing the lowest level since 1974. Early in this

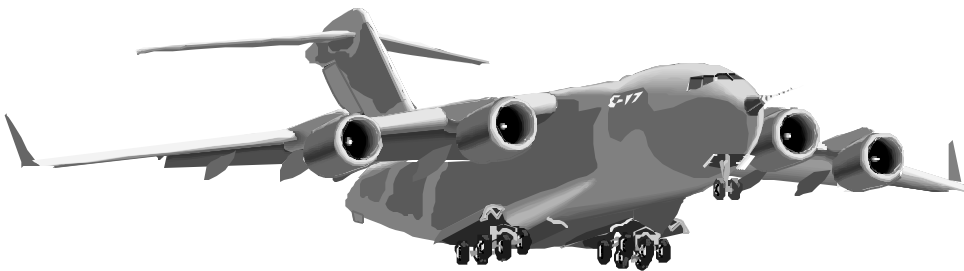
period of resource decline, the Department was able to reduce purchases of weapons without undermining battlefield superiority because weapon system age remained relatively constant. Forces were drawn down during this same period, so older equipment could be

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Air Force Modernization (Continued ...)

retired. Today, however, the significant force drawdowns are behind us. Predictably, we are experiencing an increase in the average age of key equipment coupled with an increase in the costs of maintaining an aging aircraft fleet. These added costs are showing up in the Operations and Maintenance accounts and are threatening the very modernization funding needed to put an end to the aging/high cost cycle.

For these reasons the DoD and the Air Force are working hard to assure an increased level of modernization funding that will support Departmental goals including the Air Force's balanced, time-phased



...phased modernization remains key to affordability...

modernization program. In the 1996 budget, the DoD established a goal of increasing procurement funding to \$60 billion. Our current Air Force budget plan shows an increase in procurement funding of 29% through FY03, but phased modernization remains key to affordability—obviously in a constrained resource environment it is not possible to undertake sweeping modernization efforts across all core competencies at the same time. The Air Force has developed a plan that includes specific goals in the near, mid, and longer term that permit us to meet requirements while funding core modernization efforts.

Phased Modernization Remains Key to Affordability

Global Mobility is the near-term concern. The C-17's ability to carry outsized cargo into remote or austere airfields affords America the ability to deploy forces virtually anywhere in the globe. Globemasters have supported joint forces in Bosnia, Haiti, and the Middle East.

Global Attack, Precision Engagement, Air and Space Superiority are mid-term investments. Upgrade programs for the B-1 Lancer will provide the ability to employ Precision Guided Munitions (PGMs) and counter surface and airborne threats expected into the next century. We are also buying over 75,000 PGMs that will provide for increased accuracy, adverse weather capability, standoff capability, and multiple kills per pass. PGMs will provide theater commanders with flexibility required to accomplish their missions. The Joint Direct Attack Munitions (JDAM), Sensor Fuzed Weapon (SFW) and Wind Corrected Munitions Dispenser (WCMD) continue production. The Joint Air to Surface Standoff Missile (JASSM) begins Engineering Manufacturing and Development (EMD) and the Joint Standoff Weapon (JSOW) continues development and testing as well as begins the second Low Rate Initial Production (LRIP).

Air and Space Superiority also get a mid-term investment boost with continued F-22 Raptor Engineering Manufacturing and Development and the buy of 58 aircraft through FY2003. The Raptor will replace F-15C/D Eagles which will average 24 years in age when the Raptor reaches Initial Operational Capability (IOC) in FY2006. Space Based Infrared System (SBIRS) will provide next generation ballistic missile attack warning for the United States, its deployed forces, and our allies. The Evolved Expendable Launch Vehicle (EELV) will ensure America's access to space well into the 21st Century. EELV will reduce life cycle cost by 25%, shorten launch timelines, and enable more DoD, civil and commercial launches per year.

Space and Air Superiority, Global Attack, and Precision Engagement are our late-term investments. Airborne Laser (ABL) will significantly enhance theater commanders' ability to deter or defeat ballistic missile threats. Continued development of the Joint Strike Fighter (JSF) is a primary concern during this phase. JSF will replace F-16 Falcons that will average 22 years when JSF reaches IOC in FY2010.

The balanced, time-phased modernization plan is not without risk. Several factors impact the plan's success: Congress must support the specific spending allocation proposed for DoD weapons development and procurement; DoD must realize projected savings from infrastructure reductions, acquisition reform, and other initiatives; and the DoD Acquisition Reserve account needs to work as intended, providing a degree of stability for modernization programs experiencing technical difficulties. Meanwhile, the environment for Congressional adds will change for FY1999 because the Balanced Budget agreement removes the "fiscal headroom" Congress used to finance these adds. Congressional adds have contributed to modernization levels, but, as an example, 70% of the FY1998 Congressional adds (\$530M) were for programs not on our unfunded priority list—including B-2, WC/EC-130J, Defense Airborne Reconnaissance Program (DARP) modifications and additional F-16 attrition reserve aircraft. Moreover, these dollars were offset in part by undistributed reductions to other modernization programs.

The Air Force is working hard to ensure funding that will support a balanced, time-phased modernization program. It will not be an easy road, but the commitment to modernization throughout the DoD and the Air Force is clear. There can be no argument that the men and women of the Air Force need to be equipped with the right tools to accomplish their mission. The modernization program is, very simply, the investment required to leverage our core competencies of space superiority, global attack, rapid global mobility, precision engagement, information superiority, and agile combat support, to meet the challenges of tomorrow.

Sources: Quadrennial Defense Review; Fiscal Year FY1999 Secretary of Defense Annual Report; FY1999 Office of the Secretary of Defense (Comptroller) Press Conference briefing; Proposed Assistant Secretary of the Air Force (Acquisition) Congressional hearing testimony on Modernization; Assistant Secretary of the Air Force (Budget) Congressional hearing testimony; FY1999 President's Budget Media Conference supporting documentation.



About the Author



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